

## [James Childers]

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Folkstuff - Rangelore

Gauthier, Sheldon F.

Rangelore

Tarrant Co., Dist. 7.

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James Childers, 82, a Copeville, Texas, resident, born May 14, 1857, in log cabin on father's farm at Chamberburg, Kentucky. In 1865 the family moved to Arkansaw and at the age of 18, James went to work on a cattle ranch in the Indian Territory. After terminating his range career he farmed for a livelihood.

"I was born in Kentucky at a place called Chamberburg on the Ohio River. The event happened on May 14, 1857. My father, J. H. Childers, was an early settler of the section. During my childhood the country was sparsely settled and farming and logging was the means of making a livelihood.

"The conditions under which my family lived will be a fair illustration of the community as a whole. Our home was a two room log cabin. The average home was two rooms, some were one room structures and a few had three rooms. They were double log cabins with rooms on either side, one of which contained the fire place. The fire place furnished most of the light for the room during the dark hours, [excep?] during the summer season when

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candles were used, as well as heat and a means for cooking food. If company was making a call we would light the coal oil lamp.

“During my childhood I did not know what tailored clothes were[;?] homespun was the only clothing people were able to secure. My folks, as all our neighbors did, raised the material, worked it into thread and weaved the thread into cloth and from this cloth made clothes. Even our shoes were home-made, the hides from our butchered stock were made into leather by the tanner of the community. The shoemaker made the shoes and they were good shoes too.

“Vegetables in abundance were raised in our garden and kept in a cellar from one crop to another. We raised wheat, corn and oats which gave us flour, corn meal, and feed for the stock. We hauled the grain to the [griet?] mill and traded grain to the miller for the milling charge. We had [milckcows?] [milkcows?] for dairy products and beef; and raised sheep for wool as well as mutton.

“On our place was an orchard and from it we obtained our fruit, such as apples, 2 peaches, cherries and berries of various kinds. In addition to producing fruit to eat, make preserves and jellies, the apples provided cide, which turned hard, and the peaches made brandy. Some of the corn was used to make corn whiskey. Almost all of the settlers had a still and made their own brandy and whiskey. In any home of those days would be found a jug of hard cider, brandy and whiskey. The custom for the proper welcome of a visitor was to offer liquor.

“Our smoke-house always contained a plentiful supply of hams and bacon smoked with hickory wood. During the winter months the climate of Kentucky is such that meat will keep without any processing, in summer it was necessary to salt and smoke meat. During the summer we never went hungry for fresh meat, the forest contained many different kinds of edible animals and fowls that were easily hunted. So far as food and clothes were concerned my father was never worried about an adequate supply.

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“Even a stranger in the community was a welcome guest, and people went out of their way to give him a start. But if anyone became obnoxious they had their own way of dealing with such matters. If the stamp of approval was not placed on a man, the party was compelled to leave the community, and in severe cases if they failed to leave in a hurry they were returned to their creator. There was a [feud?] [between?] some people existing all [the?] time and generally one or more decisive fights would take place during the annual religious [cam?] meeting.

“There was no regular preacher in our community but a traveling minister held [service?] once a month in a one room log cabin and once each year we had a revival lasting a week. Almost everybody attended the revivals. Those living at a distance would bring a supply of food and camp at the meeting place. During the monthly visits and the revivals the preacher would busy himself attempting to adjust differences between parties. He always succeeded in getting many of the disputants to shake hands and rededicate themselves to religion, but a few would refuse until satisfaction was obtained in fighting it out with guns. 3 “The attitude of these folks is well illustrated by an incident told me by father and which happened in our community. A feud existed between Holder and Jameson. Holder become very ill and it was feared he would die. When the preacher came he called on Holder to perform the usual duties before death and prevailed on Holder to forgive Jameson. Jameson agreed to forgive and forget. After the two men had shaken hands and agreed to be friends so that Holder could leave this world without malice in his heart, Holder said[:?] 'I want it understood that if I don't die, this farce of an agreement don't stand.'

“Besides farming, logging was a means of earning a livelihood for many people throughout our district. The timber was cut and the logs were hauled to the [Chic?] River. From the river they were rafted to various points where sawmills were located.

“At the time the Civil War ended we moved to Arkansaw in two covered wagons pulled by oxen. We crossed the Mississippi River at Memphis, Tennessee, and sent on to Pine Bluff.

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Father located a tract of land near Pine Bluff and there I spent my young manhood days. We farmed under the same conditions as in Kentucky.

“At 18 I left for the Indian Territory looking for [a?] job with a cow outfit and finally landed with a job in what has then called No-Man's-Land. That section was about 300 miles between its E. and W. border, and 50 miles wide between the N. and S. borders. At that time the territory was not attached to any state and since my time it has become a part of Oklahoma. It is that strip of land extending from the main area of the state and bordering on the N. of the Texas Panhandle. No-Man's-Land was used entirely for ranging cattle. There were some mighty large cowcamps located in the territory.

“Ranchmen were the rulers of the country. There were no state laws or officials to govern the section. Only the Federal Government had any authority there, and the Government did not maintain any courts or permanent officials to keep order. Therefore the ranchers maintained such order that existed. There was a code or rules 4 which the ranchers enforced and they had a jail in which were placed men who violated the law of the section. The jail was a log hut and a man was kept on guard night and day when anyone was in the jail.

“The rules enforced related to the cattle business. So far as the relations between men there were no rules to speak of. Each man, more or less, took care of himself, except in the matter of stealing and killing without cause. It did not require much to justify the [?] shooting of a man. For instance, if two men became engaged in a quarrel, it was allowable for them to shoot it out and the best shot would be declared to be on the right side. If the shooting was fatal to a man, it was considered the result of his own doing and no one should be blamed. But, if a man was caught stealing a yearling, he was subject to severe punishment, even to being hanged or shot.

“Because of the condition existing in No-Man's-Land, there were many men who came there to keep out of the law's hands of some state. There was an understanding among

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the People that no one should ask questions about a stranger relating to his name, where he was from or what his former business was. It was left to the stranger to volunteer such information as he desired to furnish about himself. That the citizens behaved better than in other places, so far as obeying their laws, is indicated by the kangaroo court records. Almost all violations were committed by transients. The ranchers had a kangaroo court before which violators of the code were tried, and the court was seldom called into session.

"When a stranger arrived he was accepted as a square man and treated as such so long as his conduct merited the treatment. With this condition existing one might think the territory was a sort of a den for the [seum?] of the United States, but as a whole the cowhands and the ranchers were about as dependable and square in their 5 dealings as one could meet. Perhaps this was so because there necessity did not goad nor pride tempt man to violate the laws of man. The fact is, I have never heard of a cowboy being robbed of any article. What money we cowhands had was carried on our person or in our saddle bags. When the saddles were not in use, they would be laid around the camp or chuck wagon. We never feared that anyone would molest our money.

"My first job on a cow outfit was with the 'ZH', owned by an Eastern corporation called the [Guscatine?] Cattle Company. The ZH was one of the large outfits ranging in the No-Man's-Land and its brand was carried by 60,000 or more cattle. Everything about the camp was kept in excellent shape. There was no slipshod methods about the work or operation of the ranch. The headquarters had a well kept [rancher?] house, chuck wagons with the best of cooks. The [remuda?] was stocked with the best of cow-work trained horses that could be obtained.

["?]When I started work I was in range language a greener. My starting wages were \$25, per month for the first year. Thereafter they were \$35. to [\$40?]. per month. After the old cowhands had their fun with me as butt of their jokes they took me in hand and did all they could to help we learn they work. So far as riding a horse was concerned, I could

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do it fairly well, because during the days of my youth the horse was the chief [means?] of travel. Of course riding the range and doing cow work required somewhat different riding than the ordinary riding for travel. To learn this difference did not take me long. The part of the work I had to learn completely was handling the [lariat?]. This [il?] i did readily because I had excellent teachers. During the first couple months I spent most of my time practicing throwing and handling the lariat. I was successful and at the end of my first year's work I could place the loop where I desired quite accurately. I was a proficient as the average waddy and when I terminated my career, I could throw the rope with the best.

6 "John Roberts, a Texan, was top-screw. This term was applied to indicate the ranch boss. Roberts was a proficient boss and a genuine man in every way. He started me off riding the line. This job is holding the herd together in a bunch. Almost all the time the outfit had more or less cattle cut out and being held for a drive to the market., and these were held separate from the other cattle. This required several riders working night and day. This line riding was not unplesant work during fair weather but in inclement weather at times the cattle decided to run and then the cowhand had his hands full.

"All the cattle on the ZH ranch were the wild longhorn breed and ready to run at any moment. It seemed, at times, they would run for the fun and exercise. This section was subject to severe electric storms and when one of these storms struck us we were sure of a job with a running herd. Most of the times we would be successful in holding the herd together and get the animals to milling. Occasionally, we would fail to do so and when the animals got away from us, it then required work and time to locate and bunch all the cattle. Many times we would fail to find all the animals, however, these would be located in the general roundup.

"I do not suppose there is an old cowhand who cannot, mentally and vividly, hear the snapping hoofs, clashing horns and the drumming of the animals feet hitting the ground, which came to their ears while a herd stampeded. During the darkness and a storm raging, the noise had an ominous sound. One could sense the danger ahead, because at these times it was necessary to ride at the best speed a horse could give, and do it over rough

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ground. [A?] cowhand was playing with Lady Luck every minute of the run. If the horse hit a hole or stumbled over a rock, thereby going down, the rider could not see what there was to avoid, and perhaps be thrown onto a rock or under the feet of crazed and running animals. On two occasions 'ZH' waddies were killed by a fall from a stumbling horse. Broken bones were a frequent occurrence. 7 "Next to a stampede our most dreaded event was the coming of a severe norther. The cattle would sense the approaching weather and started drifting two or more days ahead [of?] its arrival. The cattle drifted to hunt for shelter. If we did not hold the animals back they would scatter in the [loe?] of a hill or to a cluster of trees, but in a little while they would [hove?] on trusting to find better shelter. Therefore there was more or less a constant movement of the cattle. These [northers?] were not a frequent occurrence and luckily for the ranchers it was not often. Because [after?] one it required several weeks work hunting strays.

"The general roundups were held each year in the Spring and Fall. The affairs were called a general roundup and all cowcamps in the range territory would join into one outfit, operating under one roundup boss. During this roundup the country would be thoroughly combed for cattle, one section at a time. The animals driven into the roundup [he?] [dou?] [rters?] [end?] there cut out according to brands, the yearlings branded and the [males?] castrated. It required three months to accomplish the work [and?] during this time we lived [on?] a chuck wagon life. [?] slept in the open rolled in our blankets. our [food?] [ate?] cooked over a camp fire and consisted of canned vegetable, dried fruit, beef and some [pastary?]. We had some bacon and to vary the meat died occasionally some of us would kill some game. Buffalos were still existing in rather large numbers and we ate a lot of choice cuts of buffalo meat.

"I have mentioned our dread of stampedes and drifts but I must not fail to tell about the worst of all conditions which we were in constant fear, and this was the prairie fire. Every waddy was instructed to keep constant watch for fires and when smoke was seen to drop what one was doing, regardless of how important it was, and ride to the smoke. We all

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followed this rule strictly because it was necessary to stop a fire before it had a chance to spread. C12 -2/11/41 - Texas